

Indiana House of Representatives

News and Information

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REP. VERN TINCHER'S STATEHOUSE REPORT

INDIANAPOLIS – For all the talk about partisan politics at the Indiana General Assembly, there are many times when we are able to set aside our differences and work toward passing sound legislation.

Over the past week, Indiana House members were able to make compromises on a difficult issue. As a result, we are a step closer to seeing the formal creation of an Inspector General, appointed by the governor, who will ferret out fraud and corruption in state government and be accountable to the people of our state.

There have been many times in the past several weeks when we were not sure if this proposal was going to make it out of the legislative process. All lawmakers supported the idea of an Inspector General, but many were concerned that the position had more power than locally elected prosecutors in pursuing cases.

In the end, both sides agreed that changes should be made. The House majority accepted a series of amendments offered by House Democrats to the Inspector General proposal. With these amendments in place, I feel the Inspector General will be able to do the job that all of us agree needs to be done: respond to public concerns that state officials are abusing the public's trust or engaging in illegal activities.

The Inspector General proposal is now contained in Senate Bill 18, which passed the House by a 98-0 margin. The measure now returns to the Indiana Senate for concurrence with changes made in the House.

I also want to tell you about two other measures that are making their way through the legislative process that will address serious public policy concerns.

Senate Bill 444 marks the latest step in our state's fight against the production and use of methamphetamine. One of the reasons that this drug has become so commonplace is that it can be made using ingredients that can be found in most homes. These substances can be purchased easily, and the labs used to make the drug are easy to set up. Police reports indicate that meth labs have been found in all kinds of locations, including homes and vehicles.

In recent years, the Legislature has passed a series of bills aimed at stopping the spread of this drug. We have increased penalties for people who use and make meth, created an education program designed to help retailers notify law enforcement about those who are purchasing the items used to make the drug, and established a statewide task force to help move quickly to respond to new trends in manufacturing meth.

Senate Bill 444 contains several recommendations from that task force. It is aimed at curtailing access to drugs that contain either ephedrine or pseudoephedrine, two chemicals that are used to make meth. These elements are found in many types of cold medicines, and the legislation would make all products that contain these ingredients a Schedule V drug. The cold medicines would be placed behind the pharmacy counter, requiring a signature from the purchaser before they are dispensed.

For those communities that do not have a 24-hour pharmacy, the cold medicines would not be available to people seeking a common cold remedy for themselves or their children. I have proposed an amendment to Senate Bill 18 that would allow cold medicines containing ephedrine to be sold by convenience stores in one- or two-tablet packages. This would allow access to the medicine by those who have a need when the drugstore is closed.

Senate Bill 56 establishes a state Department of Homeland Security that will serve as the new home for such agencies as the State Emergency Management Agency, the Fire and Building Services Department, the Public Safety and Training Board and the Public Safety Institute.

Of course, homeland security remains a constant concern in the tragic events that took place on Sept. 11, 2001. By placing all emergency management and public safety functions under one umbrella, we will be able to respond more efficiently and effectively to all types of disasters, be they natural or caused by terrorists.

I have a concern about Senate Bill 56 because it reduces the membership of the State Building Commission, thus eliminating expertise and knowledge from the committee. I intend to offer a second reading amendment next week to restore the commission back to its original membership.

These Senate bills have been the products of bipartisan cooperation, which demonstrates that the legislative process works best when all points of view and perspectives are recognized and acknowledged, and everyone keeps an open mind and treats each other with dignity and respect. I am pleased that we were able to get back together and work through our differences.

I believe this can be the example we can follow when other major issues come up for debate in the final weeks of this legislative session.

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